



# Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



Autumn 2007

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## Summer outings with Appleby Archaeology

Yes, I know you're probably saying, "summer, what summer was that then?". But in point of fact, our summer outings this year were generally rather well-served by the weather and certainly proved popular. In fact some events saw record attendances. Obviously poor weather is a stimulant for Appleby Archaeology members – or perhaps we had all just given up on our usual holiday plans.

Anyway, we started this year's Summer Programme with a visit to the :

### Threlkeld Mining Museum.

The visit was inspired by a reference in Andrew Hoane's talk on Glencoyne last year. He mentioned an Iron Age village tucked away on the fellside behind the Museum. A quick recce and a literature-search confirmed that this was really well worth seeing - and people said the Museum was good too.

So the 23<sup>rd</sup> June saw 15 of us assembled in the car park on a day that was surprisingly dry and sunny. We were further rewarded with a warm welcome and a very interesting

impromptu lecture on Cumbrian geology and the Mining and Quarrying industries in the spacious and well-stocked Museum.



*Threlkeld Mining Museum*

Afterwards we were led up to the back gate behind the quarry and decanted onto the fellside. This was not the result of misbehaviour but because this was the way to the Iron Age village. Five minutes of walking up a rough grass bank led us to an impressive complex of fields, hut circles and trackways.



*"Iron-Age" village, Threlkeld*

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## Bizarre Archaeology

As you will know by now, the Editor is always on the look-out for newsletter contributions from members. He notes that these are still rather thin on the ground!

Still, one lives in hope. How about a competition? I challenge you to improve upon my own bid for a picture showing the most unlikely fate for an archaeological relic. The stone circle shown below is something I spotted on my hols this year. Apparently it's all that remains of a Clava-type tomb. So it would once have had a central chamber within a cairn-



*Clava-type stone circle : Aviemore*

mound accessed by a passageway. It dates from about 3000BC but now finds itself sitting in the middle of an estate of residential bungalows in Aviemore!

Beat that if you can.

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Your editor was particularly pleased to be able to point out the village "well" – a permanent if rather scummy pool beneath a large boulder. It is not known whether this has any Holy properties, but nobody felt tempted to drink from it anyway.



"Village Well" : Threlkeld

After taking in the delights of the mysterious adjoining cairn-field we all returned to the museum to see the workshops and Sir Tom, the steam-engine which the Museum Trust hopes to use to provide a railway attraction.



Sir Tom, Guide and Harry

The following month, the Society's evening trip to :

### Whitley Castle

a Roman Fort near Alston, on the 17<sup>th</sup> July, proved even more popular. While a heavy thunderstorm rattled and grumbled away up the South Tyne valley, no fewer than 24 assorted members and guests dodged the midges as they accompanied local historian, Alistair Robertson round the site.

Alistair cunningly selected a circular route that encouraged us to sample the context of the area before leading us up to the fort itself. Thus it was that we learnt about the surrounding Roman and Celtic settlements and their associated road and track way systems. We visited the modern farmsteads and their seventeenth century barns. We saw the remains of the earlier Bastle houses and looked



Ruins of Bastle House : Whitley Castle

across the valley to the site of Bronze Age burial mounds.

Only after we had taken all this in thoroughly were we led uphill and permitted to admire the fort itself and its spectacular defences. The fort is unusual in that unlike most Roman forts it is not quadrilateral but trapezoid or lozenge-shaped., as can be seen in the plan below, re-

printed from the Proceeding of the Newcastle Antiquarian Society.

Constructed on a sloping site,



Whitley Castle Roman Fort

the fort is defended on its uphill sides by a quite startling array of ditches.

Alistair gave us a chapter and verse on what is known about the site but had to admit there was really not a lot to say. There has been only limited excavation so that, beyond a few hard facts which permit us to date the fort to the second century, we are largely left with tantalising speculation. For example, the fort is thought to be called Epiacum only because Ptolemy's *Geography* places a fort of that name somewhere in this area and there are no other contenders. The name means the property or estate of Eppius. 'Eppius' is a Romanised Celtic or British name and he may have been a local leader of the tribe of Brigantes. This ties in with the belief that the fort may have been associated with a large local civil settlement.

There are also good grounds for thinking that the site may have been involved in some way with lead mining. Lead, lead-ore and slag have been found on the site and there are tantalising hints that high-value material passed through the area. Lead from Alston Moor often contains a high proportion of silver.

Some of the most interesting



*Members ready for a sit-down*

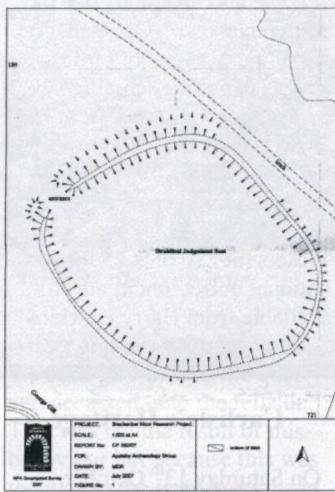
discoveries were made in a shrine associated with the spring that fed the fort's well-preserved bath-house. Two altars dedicated respectively to Hercules and the Sun god were recovered from this. The altar to the Sun god stood on a slab supported by four pillars with the water running beneath. The spring still runs strongly today but now fulfils the rather more down-to-earth role of watering the modern farm's livestock.

Finally, as a bonus as it were, in the same week, on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of July we had the opportunity to participate in a field survey of the :

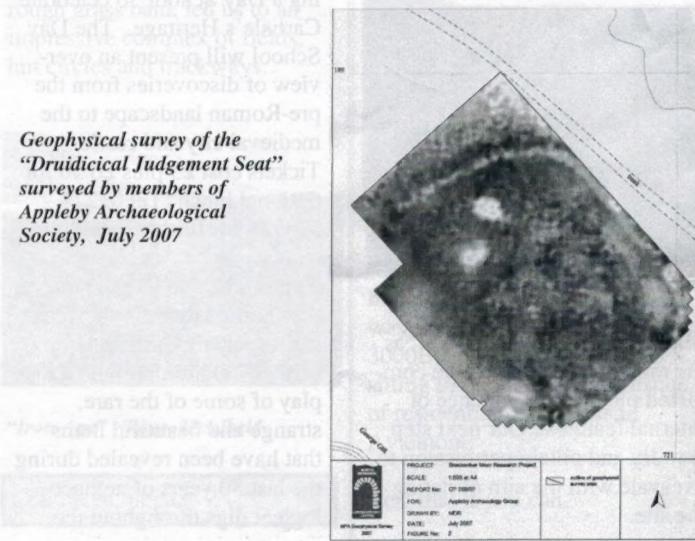
## “Druidical Judgement Seat”

When a group of us walked Brackenber Moor back in May this year (see the last issue of this Newsletter), the “Seat” was identified as a good place for the Society to develop its practical skills. Subsequently,

as a result of a lottery grant to the North Pennines Heritage trust, we were able to obtain access to professional equipment and instruction. Thus it came about that we now have both an accurate plan of the site and a geophysical survey. The results can be seen below: Once again, the weather was



*Site Plan of the “Druidical Judgement Seat” surveyed by members of Appleby Archaeological Society, July 2007*



kind to us and Thursday in particular might almost have been regarded as "too hot". The equipment proved great fun to use and, since plenty of people turned up, the work was spread across many hands and there was no risk of it getting boring. It was clear that humping the probes all day and every day must develop some unusual muscles.

The Geophysical survey was par-



*Geophysical surveying*

ticularly exciting because the data could be down-loaded to a lap-top, processed and displayed on-site.



*Down-loading the data*

Martin assures us that as well as the rather obvious ditch the completed plot shows evidence of internal features. Our next step is to try and obtain permission to excavate with the aim of dating the site.

## Classified Ads

### People and the Land

Be sure you've got your ticket for Appleby Archaeology's own "People and the Land" one day conference on 6<sup>th</sup> October. A varied programme of professional speakers, including our own Martin Railton, will talk about aspects of settlement in the Eden Valley from pre-history to the present day.

Tickets (at £10 plus £5 for optional buffet lunch) are still available from Harry Hawkins

### Carlisle's Heritage

On Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October, Tullie House Museum is holding a Day School to celebrate Carlisle's Heritage. The Day School will present an overview of discoveries from the pre-Roman landscape to the medieval city and castle. Tickets cost £5 plus £6.50 for optional lunch (Tel 01228 534781 for further details)

You might also like to note that Tullie House is showcasing a special "Carlisle Unearthed" exhibition with a display of some of the rare, strange and beautiful items that have been revealed during the last 30 years of archaeological digs throughout the city.

## Autumn Programme

### Recent Excavations at Roman Maryport

7:30 pm Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> Sept.

Paul Flynn, lecturer at the Cumbria Institute for the Arts, who led excavations at Maryport featured on Channel 4's Big Dig series will talk about his work

### Vindolanda – Size Does Matter

7:30 pm Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> Nov.

Andrew Birley, Director of Excavations at the Vindolanda Trust will talk about new views on the role of Vindolanda in the Roman defensive system.

### Lakeland Quarrying

7:30 pm Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> Dec.

Donald Angus of the Threlkeld Mining Museum Trust will be talking about the history of quarrying in the Lake District, and specifically about the quarry at Threlkeld



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